

To: City Executive Board

Date: 23rd July 2008

Item No:

Report of: Head of City Development

Title of Report: Oxford 2026: the Oxford Core Strategy proposed-submission document

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To approve the proposed submission document for Oxford's Core Strategy.

Key decision: No

Executive Lead Member: Councillors Turner and Cook

Report Approved by

Legal: Lindsay Cane

Finance: Paul Sheppard

Policy Framework: The production of this document fulfils a commitment of the Local Development Scheme. The Core Strategy will help achieve the strategic aims in the City Council's vision, and also help deliver the key themes and priorities for the City as set out in the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy.

Recommendation(s):

That City Executive Board and Council:

1. Approve the proposed submission document for Oxford's Core Strategy for publication, and invite representations on the document for a 6-week period;
2. Authorise the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with Lead Board Members and the Planning Policy Cross Party Working Group, to make any necessary editorial corrections to the proposed submission document before publication;
3. Authorise the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with Lead Board Members and the Planning Policy Cross Party Working Group, to submit the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State unless representations received on the proposed submission document raise issues of such significance that fundamental changes to the Plan would be required; and
4. Endorse the proposed submission document for development control purposes as a material consideration in planning decisions.

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to consider the proposed submission document for Oxford's Core Strategy. This is a document containing proposed policies for the Core Strategy that will be published for a period of six-weeks, within which stakeholders and the public have an opportunity to make representations.
2. It is anticipated that the document will be formally published on 5th September 2008 so as to avoid the summer holiday period and to take advantage of new regulations which come into force on 1st September 2008. Following the consideration of representations, the document will then be submitted to the Secretary of State. It should not be necessary to refer the Core Strategy back to the City Executive Board and Council before submission, unless representations are received which go so much to the heart of the Plan's soundness that fundamental changes would be required.
3. The report also sets out some relatively minor revisions to the Core Strategy timetable as a consequence of the new regulations mentioned above. Once adopted the Core Strategy will form the planning policy and spatial framework for the future of Oxford until 2026.
4. City Executive Board is asked to recommend that Council approve the proposed submission document for publication and subsequent submission to the Secretary of State. Council is asked to approve the document and to endorse it for development control purposes as a material consideration in planning decisions.

The Purpose of the Core Strategy

5. The Core Strategy will be the key document within Oxford's Local Development Framework (LDF). It sets out the key elements of the planning framework for the City, including which broad areas are suitable for housing and other strategic development needs. Essentially it will be a replacement for the Oxfordshire Structure Plan, but only relating to the City. It will also replace some of the higher-level strategic policies in the Oxford Local Plan. The 20-year timeframe of this document corresponds with the South East England Regional Assembly's (SEERA's) emerging South East Plan (SEP).
6. The Core Strategy will set the policy context for future Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). Once the Core Strategy is adopted, all subsequent DPDs and SPDs must be in conformity with the Core Strategy.
7. An important aspect of the new planning system is the change to 'spatial' policies. This means that the Core Strategy and future planning documents are no longer restricted to land-use considerations, and need to take account of the plans and strategies of other agencies. Spatial

planning policies can be delivered in a variety of ways and are not solely reliant on being implemented through development control decisions.

Policy Context

8. The Core Strategy has to be consistent with national planning policy and be in general conformity with the policies of the SEP. However, one of the challenges of spatial planning is to ensure that policies are locally distinctive and do not simply repeat national and regional guidance. The Core Strategy should also identify the main priorities that deliver the spatial aspects of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Research and evidence base

9. A wide range of research has informed the proposed submission document. The range of studies is too numerous to list here in full, but a series of background papers will be published alongside the proposed submission document. These will explain how the various studies undertaken have influenced the policies and proposals in the Core Strategy.
10. A key piece of work is the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), which examines future housing land supply within the City. This will be published for consultation alongside the proposed Core Strategy submission document.
11. An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is being undertaken to ensure that the policies in the Core Strategy do not harm the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is a European designated site. The draft AA will also be published for consultation alongside the proposed submission document.

Previous consultation

12. One of the main principles of the new planning system is that local communities and stakeholders should be involved from the outset in the preparation of planning policy documents. Extensive public consultation has therefore been conducted to coincide with the Issues and Options and the Preferred Options stages of the Core Strategy.
13. In February 2008, Members approved the Further Preferred Options Document for consultation. That document focused on the issues connected with the potential Strategic Development Area south of the city. The consultation exercise on the Further Preferred Options ended on 18th April 2008, and a summary of the main outcomes of that consultation is contained in [Appendix 1](#).

Amendment to Core Strategy timetable

14. The City Council has committed to the production of the Core Strategy DPD in the Local Development Scheme (LDS) as approved by the Secretary of State. The current LDS, as amended earlier this year,

programmed the Core Strategy to be submitted to the Secretary of State in October 2008. However, new regulations governing Local Development Frameworks require an adjustment to this timetable.

15. One of the main changes brought in by the new regulations is to move the period for formal representations on a DPD to *before* submission of the DPD to the Secretary of State. This change is designed to overcome the problem experienced by some local authorities, who have had to propose substantial changes to their plans or in some cases withdraw them and start again, because of issues that have arisen from the representations received *following* submission.
16. An amendment is therefore required to the Core Strategy timetable to indicate that the proposed submission document will be published under the new regulations in September 2008, with formal submission to the Secretary of State in November 2008 following consideration of the representations received. The examination and adoption dates would remain unchanged (April and December 2009 respectively). Under the transitional arrangements relating to the new regulations, consultation already undertaken by the City Council at previous stages of the Core Strategy would act as a proxy for the consultation requirements of the new regulations. The amended timetable for the Core Strategy is formally set out in the proposed new LDS 2008-2011, which is the subject of a separate report elsewhere on this agenda of the City Executive Board.

Proposed submission document

17. The proposed submission document is Appendix 2 to this report. In order to minimise printing costs, this will be sent out to Members separately with copies available to others on request. The document includes a series of strategic policies to guide developments and to set the context for future DPDs and SPDs. Once adopted, the Core Strategy will form part of the Oxford Local Development Framework and will be used in the determination of planning applications under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
18. The proposed submission document continues to identify existing Safeguarded Land at Pear Tree/Northern Gateway and Barton as strategic locations for development, together with the West End area of the City centre. The Northern Gateway is considered suitable for a modern employment site and supporting amenities, whilst Barton is considered suitable for predominantly residential development. The West End will include significant housing provision as part of a wide mix of uses. Safeguarded Land at Summertown is considered suitable to meet longer-term residential needs, but the main landowners have indicated that they still require the land for operational purposes and anticipate this to be the case for the foreseeable future.
19. In terms of overall housing provision, the South East Plan Panel Report recommends a minimum target for Oxford of 8,000 dwellings between 2006 and 2026 (an average of 400 dwellings per year). This figure could be subject to change as the SEP progresses to adoption. A number of potential housing sites have been identified in the SHLAA, but the

forthcoming Site Allocations DPD will need to consider whether or not these sites should be allocated for housing. Even if the strategic sites identified in the Core Strategy and all the other sites identified in the SHLAA come forward for housing, an element of 'windfalls' would still be needed to meet the 8,000 target in the SEP Panel Report.

20. The proposed urban extension to the south of the City would not count as part of Oxford's housing allocation since the land is in South Oxfordshire district. This situation would only change if it were incorporated within the City as a consequence of any future boundary review. Nevertheless, in practice it would clearly contribute to meeting Oxford's pressing housing needs, as would any further urban extensions or freestanding developments that may in future come forward close to the City.
21. The Core Strategy will supersede a number of existing Local Plan policies, which are listed in Appendix 2 to the document itself. As a consequence, some changes will be required to the existing Proposals Map. These are illustrated in the proposed map changes at Appendix 6 of the document itself. Members should note in particular that the proposed map changes include an extension to the existing boundary of the Cowley Centre District centre and a new boundary relating to the Blackbird Leys District centre. This is to reflect the fact that the Core Strategy proposes to redesignate Cowley Centre as a Primary District centre, and to establish a new mixed-use District centre at Blackbird Leys.
22. A key feature of the new development planning system is the requirement for DPDs to pass 'tests of soundness'. These tests are set out in Appendix 3 to the document itself, along with the legal requirements that also apply to DPDs. The examination of the Core Strategy will only consider these tests and legal requirements.
23. Some changes may be necessary between consideration by Council and publication in September, although these are likely to be refinement of the text /appendices rather than any significant rewording of policies. The report recommendations seek delegated authority to make such changes in consultation with Lead Board Members and the Planning Policy Cross Party Working Group.
24. The Plain Language Commission has checked the document. Prior to publication, more maps and pictures will be added to make it as user friendly as possible.

Sustainability Appraisal

25. The City Council undertook a detailed Sustainability Appraisal (SA), including a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), alongside preparation of the Preferred Options document. An addendum to the SA Report was produced in respect of the Further Preferred Options document. The appraisal considers the social, economic and environmental effects of the Core Strategy, and ensures that, as far as possible, it accords with the principles of 'sustainable development'.

26. The SA Report has been updated to reflect the policies and proposals in the proposed submission document. At this stage, only a limited amount of further work has been necessary because almost all the policies in the Core Strategy are based on options that were appraised at the time of the Preferred Options or Further Preferred Options. The updated SA Report will be published for consultation alongside the proposed submission Core Strategy. A draft copy of the updated SA Report is available for Members to view in each of the Party rooms.

Financial and Staffing Implications

27. The production of the Core Strategy is a commitment in LDS. The LDS sets out key milestones, against which the City Council's performance will be monitored and which may affect future levels of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant. The costs of consultation and further work on the Core Strategy will be met from existing budgets.

Climate Change/Environmental Impact

28. Consideration of environmental issues has been integrated into both the development and refinement of options and the formulation of the proposed policies. The Sustainability Appraisal described above has been an integral part of this process. The vision and objectives of the Core Strategy emphasise the importance of responding to the challenge of climate change and that is the theme of Section 2 of the document, which contains policies on energy and natural resources; waste and recycling; flooding and biodiversity.

Equalities Impact

29. A key part of the Core Strategy's vision is for Oxford to be a city where everyone has opportunities to have a high quality of life, and where all our diverse communities feel safe and valued. Section 4 of the proposed submission document takes as its theme promoting social inclusion and improving quality of life, and includes policies on community safety and cultural and community development. Other policies seek to deliver affordable housing, improve the mix of housing, and promote regeneration initiatives, including the proposed new District centre at Blackbird Leys and regeneration linked to proposed residential development at Barton.

Appendices

- 1 Summary of Further Preferred Options consultation
- 2 Proposed submission document for the Oxford Core Strategy *(This appendix has not been included in the printed agenda. Copies have been placed in the Group Rooms. It can be viewed with the report on the Council's website. A few hard copies will be available at the meeting.)*

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Background papers: None

Appendix 1 – Summary of Further Preferred Options Consultation

Consultation Response

At the close of the consultation, 134 questionnaires had been received. In addition, a total of 72 letters/e-mails were received from members of the public and stakeholders. A summary of the main responses to the issues raised in the questionnaire, together with the individual letters received, is set out below. A more detailed report on the consultation is available to view on the City Council's website at www.oxford.gov.uk/corestrategy.

South Oxford Strategic Development Area (SDA)

The City Council's preferred approach for the proposed urban extension (termed the South Oxford SDA in the South East Plan Panel Report) was to prepare a joint Area Action Plan with South Oxfordshire District Council to bring forward the SDA, and to seek to integrate the new community into Oxford. This preferred approach was broadly supported, with 57% of respondents to the questionnaire agreeing or strongly agreeing. Around a third of respondents (32%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the preferred approach.

A number of comments from stakeholders and the public expressed support subject to resolving certain issues, such as appropriate transport infrastructure and links (roads, public transport, and cycling), provision of local facilities (schools, healthcare, shops), and provision of green open spaces. Those objecting to the urban extension were concerned about the likely traffic and transport problems generated by this scale of development, the adverse impact on the Green Belt land, loss of natural environment and recreational areas, and potential social problems. Some respondents argued that this amount of development should be directed to other parts of the County.

Other more detailed concerns included potential flood risk and health concerns relating to the existing pylons and sewage works.

Blackbird Leys centre

Results were mixed for the two options on Blackbird Leys centre. 46% of respondents to the questionnaire either agreed or strongly agreed with the Preferred Option, to regenerate the Blackbird Leys centre and encourage its expansion. However, 24% of the respondents opposed this proposal.

The alternative option, to revitalise Blackbird Leys centre but with no expansion, received a similar degree of support with 45% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this proposal. Only 13% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The additional responses from stakeholders and the public broadly supported the expansion of Blackbird Leys centre. However, some expressed concern about its role in relation to the urban extension, e.g. that facilities should be provided within the urban extension to serve the day-to-day needs of residents rather than relying on Blackbird Leys to serve their needs.

Access and transport and the SDA

There was clear support for the preferred approach with 77% of all questionnaire respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed integrated transport measures. Only 8% of respondents opposed the preferred approach.

The additional responses from stakeholders and the public also broadly supported this approach. Concern was expressed about the potential impact on the A34, but the benefits of providing sustainable transport modes for residents of the urban extension to commute to work in Oxford were also recognised. Some respondents questioned whether the SDA would really be accessible to some of Oxford's key service and employment areas, such as the Headington hospitals.

Cultural and community development

There was widespread support for the preferred option, to protect and improve existing facilities, with 77% of respondents to the questionnaire either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this option. Only 4% opposed it. The alternative option, not to provide specific policy protection for these facilities, found little support, with 81% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this option.

Revised Spatial strategy

Just over half of all respondents to the questionnaire (53%) were supportive of the revised spatial strategy, while approximately a third (34%) opposed it and the remainder (13%) were neutral. The additional responses from stakeholders and the public also broadly supported the revised spatial strategy. Objections received were mainly concerned with the emphasis in the strategy on growth, and its implications for infrastructure provision and the City's character.

Other issues

Other key issues raised included the following:

- a number of letters supported the removal of Southfield Golf Course as a strategic development site. It was, however, requested that the Golf Course should be protected as a long-term recreational asset in the Development Plan [note: the Golf Course is designated as a protected open air sports facility in the Local Plan, and that protection will continue for the period covered by the Core Strategy];
- some respondents objected to Summertown being identified as a 'contingency' site, arguing that it should be retained as 'Safeguarded Land';
- the identification of the Peartree site (Northern Gateway) for employment led development was supported by some respondents, but concerns were expressed about transport and traffic implications, particularly the impact on the A34;
- it was argued by some respondents that alternative locations should be considered for an urban extension, e.g. adjoining Barton or Wood Farm;
- some respondents considered that the consultation was premature, pending the Government's response to the South East Plan Panel Report.